

VZCZCXRO1505
OO RUEHDA
DE RUEHAK #0405/01 0601515
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 291515Z FEB 08
FM AMEMBASSY ANKARA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5433
RUEKJCS/CJCS WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHDC//PA
RUEUITH/ODC ANKARA TU
INFO RUEHTH/AMEMBASSY ATHENS 8717
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 3947
RUEHDA/AMCONSUL ADANA 2738
RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS 6445
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 6278
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2858
RUEUITH/DET 1 39LG ANKARA TU
RHMFISS/USDOCO 6ATAF IZMIR TU
RHMFISS/39OS INCIRLIK AB TU
RHMFISS/AFOSI DET 523 IZMIR TU
RHMFISS/39ABG INCIRLIK AB TU
RHMFISS/AFOSI DET 522 INCIRLIK AB TU
RUEUITH/AFLO ANKARA TU

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 000405

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR INR/R/MR, EUR/SE, EUR/PD, NEA/PD, DRL
JCS PASS J-5/CDR S. WRIGHT

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 29, 2008

In Today's Papers

Turkish Military: 237 PKK Terrorists, 24 Soldiers Killed in Iraq Operations

All papers report Turkish ground operations in northern Iraq continue despite the heavy snowfall in the region. Turkish troops took control of strategic areas near the PKK camp in Zap and along the roads leading to the PKK command center in Zap. The Turkish General Staff (TGS) said in a statement yesterday seven terrorists were killed in clashes on Wednesday night, which brings the terrorist casualties since the beginning of the incursion to 237, and the Turkish losses to 24.

Iraq: All Turkish Troops Are Pulling Out of Iraq

Turkish televisions report Friday morning that international wire agencies report an unidentified senior Turkish military source said some Turkish troops have returned to home after completing their mission in northern Iraq, but no full withdrawal has begun. A spokesman for the Kurdish Peshmerge forces quoted Iraqi border guards as saying there had been no attacks by Turkish forces overnight, and that troops were withdrawing. NTV reports the Iraqi FM Hoshiyar Zebari said all Turkish troops have withdrawn from northern Iraq. The Turkish General Staff (TGS) has not denied reports of withdrawal, says NTV.

Gates Meets Turkish Leaders in Ankara

All papers report Defense Secretary Robert Gates met on Thursday with President Abdullah Gul, Prime Minister Erdogan, the Chief of the General Staff (TGS) Yasar Buyukanit, and Defense Minister Vecdi Gonul during his one-day visit to Ankara. Gates reportedly urged Turkey to keep its cross-border operations short and focus on precise targets. Turkish leaders gave Gates a 'unified message' that the operations would continue until the targets are achieved, say papers.

Commenting on Gates' earlier remarks at a joint press event yesterday TGS Chief General Buyukanit said, "Turkey has been combating terror for the last 24 years. I've reminded Gates that

the US has been fighting against terror in Afghanistan for long years; Gates understands Turkey." Islamist-oriented Zaman claims that in his meeting with Gates, Buyukanit turned down the US demand for Turkish combat troops for Afghanistan.

In a press conference after the meeting with Gonul, Gates reiterated US warnings that Turkey should seek a balance between its right to self-defense and the territorial integrity of Iraq, the ongoing Turkish offensive in northern Iraq should be short and precisely targeted, and military approaches should be supported by economic programs and political outreach. That is the only way to isolate terrorists from the population and provide a long-term solution to the problem, Gates said. He also voiced content over the Turkish government working closely with the Iraqi leaders including President Talabani, Prime Minister al-Maliki, and the regional Kurdish administration leader Masssoud Barzani. Gates rejected allegations that the US would rescind its intelligence and surveillance assistance for the Turkish operations. "The US and Turkey have shared interests, and those interests are probably not advanced by making threats or threatening to cut off intelligence," he emphasized.

President Gul and Prime Minister Erdogan also stressed after meeting Gates that the goal of the Turkish operation was to ensure border security. He said Turkish troops would return when their mission is accomplished.

Mainstream Milliyet says Gates listed demands from the Turkish government at the press conference, but behind closed doors he agreed that Turkey was right in its fight against terror. Okay Gonensin writes in mainstream Vatan that as seen in Cyprus, efforts to seek military solutions to social and political problems are

ANKARA 00000405 002 OF 003

doomed to fail. Gonensin says the military approach was the least important aspect of the PKK question, stressing that the solution was in Turkey, and not in northern Iraq or Washington.

Editorial Commentary on Secretary Gates' Turkey Visit

"Two Messages to Gates"

Fikret Bila is a senior media figure in Ankara and an author of books on the Iraq war and Turkish-American relations.

He wrote in mainstream Milliyet (2/29):

"There are two primary question marks regarding Secretary Gates' visit to Ankara. First of all, did he really urge Turkey to withdraw from northern Iraq within a week or two? And did he ask for Turkish combat troops for Afghanistan in exchange for US support for the cross border operation? The answer to the first question is this: Secretary Gates actually softened his 'one week or two' rhetoric in Ankara. Instead of using strong language about timing, he expressed a moderate tone when he said, 'we hope that such kind of operations are short.' In return, the Turkish Defense Minister clearly stated, 'the fight against terrorism is a duty which cannot be left unfinished, and this mission will continue until terrorist camps and their infrastructure have been completely eliminated.' We should also add that Secretary Gates did not add any new comments and he expressed understanding for Turkey's difficult struggle against terror. Minister Gonul, in fact, answered Secretary Gates' February 6th letter requesting Turkish troops in Afghanistan. Gonul stated clearly Turkey will not be able to send more troops. When this issue came up during their meeting, Gonul told Gates, 'Turkey would have been more helpful in Afghanistan had Turkey not been focused on the Southeast issue.' In sum, Turkey did not pledge more troops for Afghanistan in exchange for US support for land operations in northern Iraq."

"The Withdrawal Calendar"

Erdal Safak is an expert on international relations and a senior columnist for mainstream Sabah.

He wrote in mainstream Sabah (2/29):

"Secretary Gates warned Turkey to keep its cross border operation short in an effort to eliminate anxiety in international public opinion. In reality, both President Bush and Secretary Gates are well aware of the fact that they should not pressure Turkey too much

on this matter. First of all, the useless trilateral coordination mechanism, which was an American initiative, caused Turkey to waste 18 months in its fight against terrorism. During this failed initiative, the PKK replenished its supply of weapons and recruited additional militants. In addition, Turkey's recent diplomatic efforts successfully convinced the US and the EU that a land operation was necessary in order to eliminate the PKK's terrorist threat. Turkey's goal is very clear. The land operations seek to eliminate the PKK's ability to use northern Iraq as a base from which terrorist attacks are launched against Turkey. Given the target, neither the Turkish General Staff nor the government can responsibly argue for a withdrawal before the job is completed. Moreover, the US has set a precedent by refusing to withdraw from Iraq. The US will not withdraw from Iraq before security is established. Turkey is trying to do the same thing in northern Iraq that the US is doing in Afghanistan."

The Turban Issue Has Turned in to Chaos

All papers: The Inter-University Board convened yesterday to discuss the turban issue. The Board urged YOK President Prof. Yusuf Ziya Ozcan to resign from his position due to his stance concerning the headscarf. The board points to Ozcan's written memo ordering university rectors to allow students wearing the turban to enter universities. Mainstream Milliyet reports that the Board also asked President Gul to remove Ozcan from his office if he does not resign.

Papers report that the Ankara Chief Prosecutor has initiated an investigation into Prof. Ozcan to determine if he overstepped his duties when he ordered rectors to allow students with turban in

ANKARA 00000405 003 OF 003

universities. Meanwhile, AKP vice-chairman Dengir Mir Firat said that the rectors are committing a crime by not allowing students with turban into universities. He urged the prosecutors to take action against them. Liberal Radikal's front-page headline reads, "University and AKP Reach Compromise on Headscarf: Prosecutors Should Take Action." Meanwhile, the Constitutional Court process to annul the amendments to articles 10 and 42 started. Supreme Court President Hasim Kilic's sent the application to the court reporter. The non-binding report will be distributed among Supreme Court members and they will convene to announce their decision, adds Radikal.

TV News:
NTV

Domestic News

- Parliament's commission for interior affairs has approved a bill for the establishment of 43 new municipalities.

- Professor Ali Bardakoglu, the head of religious affairs 'Diyanet' has rejected British press reports that there were preparations in Turkey to reform Islam. He added Diyanet was only working towards a better understanding of the Prophet Muhammad's sayings.

- Turkish Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association (TUSIAD) and the Turkish Central Bank have unveiled the first part of a report on integration with the global economy.

International News

- On Thursday, newly-elected Cyprus president Dimitris Christofias named Markos Kyprianou, the EU Health Commissioner, as his foreign minister.

- Nine million pilgrims have gathered in the Iraqi city of Karbala to mark Arbreen, one of the holiest religious ceremonies for Shiite Muslims.

- Austria's President Heinz Fischer has approved the Austrian government's decision to recognize Kosovo.

WILSON